

The Freedom Agenda (FA) of the Black Radical Congress (BRC). Ratified by the BRC National Council (NC), April 17, 1999, Baltimore, Maryland.

PREAMBLE

During the last 500 years, humanity has displayed on a colossal scale its capacity for creative genius and ruthless destruction, for brutal oppression and indomitable survival, for rigid tradition and rapid change. The Americas evolved to their present state of development at great cost to their original, indigenous peoples, and at great cost to those whose labor enabled modernization under the yoke of that protracted crime against humanity, slavery. Even so, a good idea is implicit in the Declaration of Independence of the United States: that all people are "endowed with certain inalienable rights, and among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." That the idea of a just society, contained in those words, remains unrealized is what compels this declaration.

Not only has the idea not been realized, but we are moving further away from its realization by the hour. Global capitalism, both the cause and effect of neo-liberal and Reaganist policies, has facilitated the transfer of enormous wealth from the bottom to the top of society in recent years, concentrating the control of abundant resources in ever fewer hands. As a result, the working people who constitute the vast majority of people have confronted a steady decline in their prospects for earning a decent living and controlling their lives. In the U.S., the threat of sudden unemployment hangs over most households. We pay unfair taxes and receive fewer services, while multibillion-dollar fortunes accumulate in the private sector. Prisons proliferate as budgets are slashed for public schools, day care, healthcare and welfare. The grip of big money on the two-party electoral process has robbed us of control over the political institutions that are mandated to serve us. We are losing ground, and democracy is more and more elusive.

As for people of African descent, most of whose ancestors were among the shackled millions who helped build the edifices and culture of the Americas, we carry an enormously disproportionate burden. In the U.S., the living legacy of slavery, and the pervasiveness of institutional white supremacy, have placed us on all-too-familiar terms with poverty, urban and rural; exploitative conditions of employment; disproportionately high rates of unemployment and underemployment; inferior health care; substandard education; the corrosive drug trade, with its accompanying gun violence; police brutality and its partner, excessive incarceration; hate-inspired terrorism; a biased legal system, and discrimination of every kind -- persistent even after the end of legal segregation.

Resistance is in our marrow as Black people, given our history in this place. From the Haitian revolution, to the U.S. abolitionist movement against slavery, to the 20th Century movement for civil rights and empowerment, we have struggled and died for justice. We believe that struggle must continue, and with renewed vigor. Our historical experiences suggest to us, by negative example, what a truly just and democratic society should look like: It should be democratic, not just in myth but in practice, a society in which all people -- regardless of color, ethnicity, religion, nationality, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, family structure, or mental or physical capability -- enjoy full human

rights, the fruits of their labor, and the freedom to realize their full human potential. If you agree, and if you are committed to helping achieve justice and democracy in the 21st Century, please sign your name and/or the name of your organization to this 15-point Freedom Agenda.

THE FREEDOM AGENDA

I. We will fight for the human rights of Black people and all people.

We will struggle for a society and world in which every individual enjoys full human rights, full protection of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, and in the United States equal protection of the Constitution and of all the laws. We seek a society in which every individual-- regardless of color, nationality, national origin, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age, family structure, or mental or physical capability-- is free to experience "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." We affirm that all people are entitled to:

- a. a safe and secure home;
- b. employment at a living wage -- that is, compensation for the full value of their labor;
- c. free, quality health care, including full reproductive freedom with the right to choose when or whether to bear children, and free, quality child care;
- d. free, quality public education.

We oppose the Human Genome Project in its current form and with its current leadership, and we oppose all sociobiological or genetic experiments that are spurred by, and help perpetuate, scientific racism.

We will fight for a society and world in which every individual and all social groups can live secure, dignified lives.

II. We will fight for political democracy.

We will struggle to expand political democracy to ensure the people's greater participation in decision-making. In the U.S., we will work to replace the current two-party, winner-take-all electoral system with a more democratic multiparty system based on proportional representation, and we will fight to abolish all registration procedures that restrict the number of eligible voters. We oppose private financing of electoral campaigns, especially corporate contributions; we will work to replace the present corrupt system with public financing.

III. We will fight to advance beyond capitalism, which has demonstrated its structural incapacity to address basic human needs worldwide and, in particular, the needs of Black people.

Guided by our belief that people should come before profits, we will fight to maximize economic democracy and economic justice:

- a. We seek full employment at livable wages, public control of private sector financial operations, worker control of production decisions, and a guaranteed annual income for the needy;
- b. we will fight to end racial discrimination by capitalist enterprises, especially banks, insurance companies and other financial institutions;
- c. we seek a society in which working people enjoy safe working conditions and flexible hours to accommodate family responsibilities, leisure and vacations;
- d. we seek laws mandating public ownership of utilities, and mandating federal and local budgetary emphases on programs for the general welfare-- health care, education, public transportation, recreation and infrastructure;
- e. we will struggle for laws that regulate private sector business practices, especially regarding prices, fees, plant shutdowns and job relocations -- where shutdowns are permitted, adequate compensation to workers shall be required;
- f. we support the historical mission of trade unions to represent workers' interests and to negotiate on their behalf;
- g. we seek a fair, equitable, highly progressive tax system that places the heaviest taxes on the wealthiest sector, and we seek expansion of the earned income tax credit.

IV. We will fight to end the super-exploitation of Southern workers.

More than 50 percent of people of African descent residing in the U.S. live in the South, where workers' earnings and general welfare are besieged by corporate practices, and where "right to work" laws undermine union organizing. Thus, we seek relief for Southern workers from corporate oppression, and we will struggle to repeal anti-union laws. We will also fight for aid to Black farmers, and for the restoration of farm land seized from them by agribusiness, speculators and real estate developers.

V. We will struggle to ensure that all people in society receive free public education.

We affirm that all are entitled to free, quality public education throughout their lifetime. Free education should include adult education and retraining for occupational and career

changes. We will fight to ensure that curricula in U.S. schools, colleges and universities are anti-racist, anti-sexist and anti-homophobic, and for curricula that adequately accommodate students' needs to express and develop their artistic, musical or other creative potential.

VI. We will struggle against state terrorism.

We will fight for a society in which every person and every community is free from state repression, including freedom from state-sponsored surveillance. We seek amnesty for, and the release of, all political prisoners. We will struggle to repeal all legislation that expands the police power of the state and undermines the U.S. Constitution's First and Fourth Amendments. We will fight to eliminate the deliberate trafficking in drugs and weapons in our communities by organized crime, and by institutions of the state such as the Central Intelligence Agency.

VII. We will struggle for a clean and healthy environment.

We will fight for a society in which the welfare of people and the natural environment takes precedence over commercial profits and political expediency. We will work to protect, preserve and enhance society's and the planet's natural heritage -- forests, lakes, rivers, oceans, mountain ranges, animal life, flora and fauna. In the U.S., we will struggle against environmental racism by fighting for laws that strictly regulate the disposal of hazardous industrial waste, and that forbid both the discriminatory targeting of poor and non-white communities for dumping and despoilment of the natural environment.

VIII. We will fight to abolish police brutality, unwarranted incarceration and the death penalty.

We are determined to end police brutality and murder:

- a. We will fight for strong civilian oversight of police work by elected civilian review boards that are empowered to discipline police misconduct and enforce residency requirements for police officers;
- b. we seek fundamental changes in police training and education to emphasize public service over social control as the context in which law enforcement occurs, and to stress respect for the histories and cultures of the U.S.-born and immigrant communities served.
- c. we seek to limit incarceration to the most violent criminals, only those who have clearly demonstrated their danger to the lives and limbs of others;
- d. regarding non-violent offenders, we demand that they be released and provided with appropriate medical, rehabilitative and educative assistance without incarceration.

e. we will struggle for abolition of the death penalty, which has been abolished in the majority of developed nations. In the U.S., the history of the death penalty's application is inextricable from the nation's origins as a slave state. Since Emancipation, it has been a white supremacist tool intended to maintain control over a population perceived as an alien, ongoing threat to the social order. Application of the death penalty, which is highly discriminatory on the basis of color and class, violates international human rights law and must be eliminated.

IX. We will fight for gender equality, for women's liberation, and for women's rights to be recognized as human rights in all areas of personal, social, economic and political life.

We will work to create a society and world in which women of African descent, along with their sisters of other colors, nationalities and backgrounds, shall enjoy non-discriminatory access to the education, training and occupations of their choice. We will struggle to ensure that all women enjoy equal access to quality health care and full reproductive rights, including the right to determine when or whether they will bear children and the right to a safe, legal abortion. We will fight to end domestic abuse and sexual harassment in the workplace.

X. We recognize lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people as full and equal members of society, and of our communities.

We affirm the right of all people to love whom they choose, to openly express their sexuality, and to live in the family units that meet their needs. We will fight against homophobia, and we support anti-homophobic instruction in public schools. We will fight for effective legal protections for the civil rights and civil liberties of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, and we demand that violence and murder committed against such people be prosecuted as hate crimes. We will also fight to end discrimination against this sector in employment, health care, social welfare and other areas.

XI. We support affirmative action.

We will fight to retain and expand affirmative action policies in education, employment, the awarding of government contracts and all other areas affected by historical and contemporary injustices. Affirmative action, with goals and timetables, is indispensable for achieving equal opportunity, justice and fairness for the members of all historically oppressed groups.

XII. We will fight for reparations.

Reparations is a well-established principle of international law that should be applied in the U.S. Historically, the U.S. has been both the recipient and disburser of reparations. As the descendants of enslaved Africans, we have the legal and moral right to receive just compensation for the oppression, systematic brutality and economic exploitation Black

people have suffered historically and continue to experience today. Thus, we seek reparations from the U.S. for

- a. its illegal assault on African peoples during the slave trade;
- b. its exploitation of Black labor during slavery, and
- c. its systematic and totalitarian physical, economic and cultural violence against people of African descent over the last four centuries.

XIII. We will struggle to build multicultural solidarity and alliances among all people of color.

We will fight against white supremacist tactics aimed at dividing people of color. We seek alliances with other people of color to develop unified strategies for achieving multicultural democracy, and for overcoming the divisions that exist around such issues as immigration, bilingual education, political representation and allocation of resources.

XIV. We will uphold the right of the African American people to self-determination.

The formation of the Black Radical Congress in June 1998 was an act of African American self-determination, a principle which is codified in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. The African American people are entitled to define the direction, priorities, allies and goals of our struggle against national and racial oppression. Building the power to exercise these prerogatives is central to our struggle against all the systems of oppression confronting our people. Therefore, we will fight for both a national program of liberation and for a mass base of power in the social sectors, institutions, all levels of government, communities and territories of society that affect the lives of our people.

XV. We support the liberation struggles of all oppressed people.

We affirm our solidarity with peoples of African descent throughout the African diaspora. We support their struggles against imperialism and neo-colonialism from without, as well as against governmental corruption, exploitation and human rights abuses from within. We especially support struggles against transnational corporations, whose global market practices gravely exploit all workers, abuse workers' rights and threaten all workers' welfare. We affirm our solidarity with all oppressed people around the world, whatever their color, nation or religion --none of us is free unless all are free. We believe that all people everywhere should enjoy the right to self-determination and the right to pursue their dreams, unfettered by exploitation and discrimination.

[End of Freedom Agenda - Ratified April 17, 1999]